

Trials and Tribulations

THE UPS AND DOWNS OF TRAINING ALASKAN MALAMUTES



Is your mal this excited to come to you? Velvet explains training tricks to make you a happier dog owner and give you an edge in competition.

Come One, Come All!

This month, Rally Top Ten and obedience competitor Velvet Rogers describes how she achieves a consistent and enthusiastic “Come on Recall.”

Let me tell you what an avid Come on Recall can do.....

Several years ago, I was taking a conformation handling class with my malamute Bandit. The instructor wanted to be sure the dogs would accept someone besides the owner handling the dog in the show ring if it ever

became necessary, so we all traded dogs. We worked for 15 minutes or so with each other's dogs and then got ready to trade back to our own dogs.

The instructor took the dog I had and returned her to her owner. When I was “dog free,” I told the woman who had Bandit to just let him go, that he would come to me. So she dropped the leash, I said, “Bandit, Come!” and leaned forward ready to grab him just in case he ran past me.

Well, he exploded like a shot out of a gun, and when he was about five feet away from me, he

launched into the air, catching me in the chest and knocking me over like a felled tree! I fell flat on my back with the wind knocked out of

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me, and I couldn't catch my breath because he was lying on my chest licking my face! He still does a very enthusiastic Come on Recall!

Editor's Note:

Have a Malamute Moment from training, working, or competition to share for Bloopers? Send your story (150 words or less) and a photo to Karina Burger at info@winterstarfarm.com. Names can be changed to hide your identity, so send it today! Thanks!



Step-by-Step

Reward Voluntary Attention



To get this kind of rapt attention from your mal, start by rewarding him each time he pays attention to you. Working with your puppy loose in

a fenced yard or on a slack leash, have treats ready and wait for him to look at you. The instant he does, praise him (click if you are using a clicker) and give him a treat. Repeat several times. Soon he'll find you the most exciting thing to look at, and you will have the bond you need to not only train a super come on recall, but to teach him other commands too!

Play Chase



The next step is to get your puppy excited to run toward you. Playing chase is fun for them and creates enthusiasm for the command. Starting on leash, show the puppy you have a treat, then say his name and "come" and turn and run a few feet. Give him lots of praise and the treat for following, and use your leash if needed to keep him with you. As the pup learns what to do, increase your distance and speed and remove the leash.

Avoid at All Costs

Never punish your dog when he comes to you. Make it a rewarding experience for him, and you'll enjoy having a dog delighted to come when you call!

How I Train Come on Recall



If your dog is leash trained and needs to come better when you call, I like to use a flexi-lead to practice. The lead lets me keep control so the dog succeeds. When the dog is doing well on leash, I start training him off leash.

I have raised Alaskan malamutes for a little over 28 years. In that time, I have used many methods to teach the "Come on Recall." One of the earliest methods I used was to clip a long line onto the puppy's flat, buckle collar and let him wander around a bit. I would call the puppy's name and then pull the line to get him to come to me. I quickly realized that this method didn't work well with very independent dogs or dogs that were not completely leash trained. They would sometimes fight the leash to the point they would hurt themselves. I hated the fear and resistance I would see in the pup's eyes, so I began searching for a much more positive method to teach the "Come" command. Nowadays, I take the puppy out in a fenced-in yard with a pocket full of his favorite treats and get comfortable. If he doesn't pay attention to me, I will sometimes use a hidden squeaker toy to get him to look at me, or I just wait and let him explore. When he looks toward me, I call his name in a very happy, upbeat voice. I do not say

anything but his name at this point. Once he begins to approach me, I mark the behavior by saying "yes!" or "good boy," and when he arrives I give him a treat. If he doesn't get it on the first couple of attempts, I walk around the yard with him, still with treats in my pockets. I do the same procedure as before, call his name and watch to see if he starts to come to me. If he does not, I turn and run away, clapping my hands and calling his name. When he turns to chase me, as most dogs will do, I stop and let him catch up, telling him "good boy" as he is coming to me. I give him a treat and let him wander off again within the confines of the fenced yard. By this time, the pup usually has figured out that he will get the treat much quicker if he keeps an eye on me, so he doesn't wander far. Once I consistently get the correct response, I add the command, "Come." We play this game several times, but we always end the session on a positive note, with the dog earning his treat.

Occasionally I will use a clicker to mark the behavior, but it

sometimes gets to be too much to hold in my hands with the treats, the toy, and the clicker. Also, most clickers sound very much alike, and I would rather the dog be attuned to my voice. So, even if I do use a clicker, I also use my voice to reinforce the behavior.

Once in a while I get a dog that is leash trained but still has not been taught to come on command. I attach a flexi-lead to his collar, and we take a walk. I let him go out a few feet in front of me, then call his name and give the command "Come," always using a happy voice. If he does not come immediately, I reel in the line until he is right next to me, saying "yes!" or "good boy" as he approaches, then I give him a treat and pet him, letting him know he has done what I wanted. I work him out further and further from me as he begins to respond to the command. I always end the training session on a positive note and then let the dog play for a while as an additional reward.

One thing to avoid at all costs is to call the dog to you and then correct or discipline him when he gets there. Never, never call a dog and chastise him when he comes. Coming to his owner should always be a positive, happy, rewarding action.

I feel that the Come on Recall is the most important obedience command a dog can learn. It can keep him close to you, prevent him from getting into trouble, or even save his life. Most instructors teach the Sit, Stay, and Down first, but I have found that if you get a puppy bonded to you first, then teach him that coming to you is a good thing, the dog will look forward to coming to your call. Not only does it prepare him for obedience competition, but that trained response has helped many dog owners prevent a tragedy.

Bloopers

Readers share their Malamute Moments

Go, Speed Racer, Go



About two years ago, I entered my Thunder, U-Am Ch Ken-Dar's Arctic Thunder Cloud, CGC, RA, TDI, in Novice B obedience. We practiced and proofed for weeks. We even worked on his stays at the campus, while students were walking from classes. It was great. I was so confident that he was ready!!

Show day came, and it was our turn in the ring. I was pleased to be showing to Judge Ted Walshesky, who always makes you feel at ease. I was so sure that we were going to do fine.

Our on and off lead healing went well; the figure eight sits could have been better, but were not too bad! Then we were setting up for the recall. I was breathing easier, thinking, "we are almost there." I sit Thunder and leave him. When I turned and gave the command to come, Thunder broke into a fast run and did three laps around the ring - paying no attention to me whatsoever! Exhibitors were laughing and so was the Judge!! I put my head down and thought, "I wish I had a hole to crawl into." Right then, Thunder came to heel position beside me, looked up at Mr. Walshesky, and howled as loud and long as he could. Everyone was in stitches - including me. Mr. Walshesky called Thunder "The Howler," a nickname that has stuck!

~ **Darlene Puhatch**

About the Author

Velvet Rogers has always loved animals, especially dogs and horses. Her interest in Alaskan malamutes began 28 years ago in Michigan, when she saw a photograph in a book by Dianne Ross depicting an Alaskan malamute pulling a 10,000 pound U-Haul truck. As a weight lifter, she knew instantly that this was the breed for her! Velvet's first malamute, Ranger, was her Christmas present in 1982. Together, they earned a Companion Dog obedience title by the time he was two years old, and then went on to try their hand at dog sledding and back packing. More mals followed, and in December of 1987, Velvet moved to California - with three mals vying for shotgun in her Jeep Scrambler!



An AMCA member since 2005, Velvet also belongs to the Kennel Club of Palm Springs. She enjoys showing her mals in conformation, rally, and obedience, and when time permits, she and her dogs visit incarcerated teens. An avid spinner and weaver, Velvet loves it when the dogs blow coat in the summer, and saves their fur to spin into yarn! Always interested in learning more about our great breed, Velvet welcomes you to contact her at terciapelo@msn.com.